

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM



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DEAR MEMBER,

One of the greatest hindrances to action to-day is that modern society is so many-sided and presents such an endless variety of tasks that our interest flits from one to another, and each of us in turn invites others to join him in pursuing his own special hare. As a result we are unable to agree about any particular course of action and keep going round in circles. The only escape from this paralysis is that out of the host of jostling and competing ideas two or three should acquire a different status from the others as embodying a central purpose to which all other ideas and projects are related.

THE NATION AND ITS YOUTH

It has seemed to me for a long time that one such purpose is forcing its way to the front in a good many different quarters and contexts. The impression is confirmed by the recent study of a number of documents¹ and a good many conversations. Let us make up our minds to do the right thing by our boys and girls between the ages of fourteen and eighteen, and much else will fall into line.

I gave some typical facts last week about the state of things in one of our counties. We may take it that three-quarters of the young manhood and womanhood of this country receive no considered help during the critical years of puberty, when their attitude to life is being formed, and when they pass from the sheltered life of the school to find (or fail to find) their footing in the rough world. Let that fact sink in. No member of the well-to-do classes ever dreams of allowing the education of his child to cease at the age of fourteen. Why should it be tolerated in the case of others?²

No greater step could be taken towards creating a *real* new order, as contrasted with paper utopias which end in disillusionment, than that the nation should accept its responsibilities for making the good life possible for all its members and determine that every future citizen should have the chance of making his fullest contribution to the common good. If that is what we intend, the time to lay the foundations of the new order is *now*, when the compulsory registration of boys and girls between sixteen and eighteen has introduced a new, vitalizing principle, and when the war, by demanding from young and old alike the utmost they can give and by calling them to share in an overriding common purpose, creates the opportunity for a leap to a new level.

We may take it that as soon as possible after the war the school-leaving age will be raised to sixteen. When we say in addition that it is vital that boys and girls should be treated primarily as citizens in training up to the age of eighteen, this does not mean that they will go to one or other of the existing types of secondary schools. The true

¹ e.g. *Education: A Plan for the Future*, issued by the Association of Directors of Education (Oxford University Press, 6d.); recent issues of *The Times Educational Supplement*; an article of exceptional wisdom and insight by Professor Fred Clarke in the *Sociological Review* (July-Oct., 1941); and several private memoranda.

² If you have any question about the consequences of this neglect of the adolescent, read the report of *The Young Adult in Wales* (South Wales Council of Social Service, 118 Cathedral Road, Cardiff, 1s.), a brief summary of which was given in C.N.L. No. 85, or the chapter on "The Dead End" in Dr. A. E. Morgan's *The Needs of Youth* (Oxford University Press, 10s.). You will agree with Dr. Morgan that no feelings or words can be too strong to describe the loss suffered by the community or the misery inflicted on the individual by this appalling wastage of human lives.

solution is not to be found in terms of prevailing modes of thought. We have to widen our outlook. Along with the awakening of a sense of responsibility for the adolescent members of the nation there is also struggling to the birth a broader and richer conception of education, which takes account of other educative influences besides the organized and segregated life of the school. The connection between education and life is vital, and training is apt to become artificial unless it is given in an environment in which real work is being undertaken. As the years of manhood and womanhood approach, the growing desire to assert one's independence finds satisfaction in the earning of a livelihood. It ought to be clear that there can be no real national culture or sound educational service that has not a living relation to the major occupations by which the people live. It may be assumed that the great majority of boys and girls after the age of sixteen will receive their further training in some form of industry or service. But the vital change in principle is that the educative purpose must be dominant. It follows:—

(1) That in place of the selection of a few to enjoy the privileges of "secondary" education there must be selection of *all* for that form of post-primary education which will best enable each to make the most of his life.

(2) That power must be taken to control the types of employment which boys and girls enter on leaving school, since it is the nature of the job far more than supplementary schooling that determines what they will be and what they can make of their lives in the future.

(3) That types of employment destructive of manhood and womanhood must be barred, and steps taken to devise the most constructive and educative forms of employment for adolescents. (This is a vast undertaking involving the co-operation of the Ministry of Labour, Board of Education, employers, trade unions and social service agencies.)

(4) That training must be provided for those who cannot find jobs, in order that they may be saved from the devastating effects of unemployment at the most critical period of life.

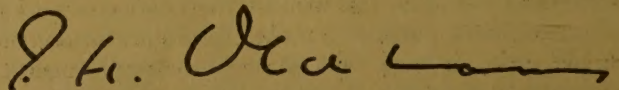
(5) That statutory provision must be made for time out of working hours for continued education, mental and physical, with special attention to the type of training which develops the qualities of alertness, quickness of observation, initiative and endurance that are necessary to the citizen both in peace and in war.¹

(6) That bold measures are required at once to meet the urgent needs of youth in war time and to harvest the opportunities which the war presents.

To concentrate on the crucial years of sixteen to eighteen will cast a light on educational policy both backwards and forwards, making clearer both what needs to be done up to that age and the type of further education which belongs to the years of maturity. It will lead directly also to the programme of national health and well-being, on which the Directors of Education in their statement rightly lay stress. It will inject a fresh stimulus into thought about the problems of industry. And in the process of fulfilling our duty to youth we may find that our scale of values has insensibly changed and that our national life has gained a richer meaning.

The next News-Letter will be written by Dr. William Paton, who needs no introduction to our members.

Yours sincerely,



¹ As set forth, for example, in *The County Badge, or the Fourfold Achievement* (Oxford University Press, 6d.).

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